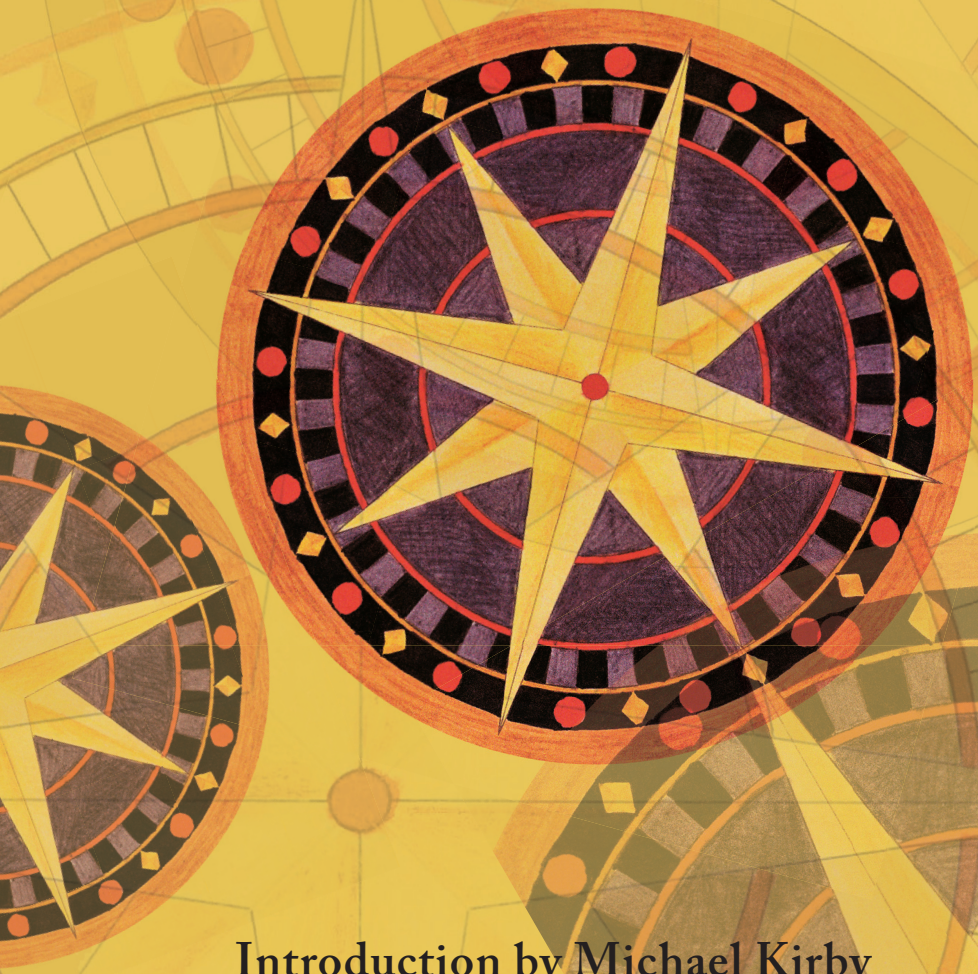
Five Uneasy Pieces

Essays on Scripture and Sexuality



Introduction by Michael Kirby
Foreword by Bill Countryman

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Essays on Scripture and Sexuality

Edited by Nigel Wright
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Adelaide
2012

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Editor's Prologue

Nigel Wright

I was born on 16 October 1947 in a country hospital at Cohuna in North Central Victoria. I came into this world with a long family story in which I gradually learned my place on the family tree. I was baptised as soon as I was born by the Matron of the hospital and thereby inducted into the story of my second family: the Church, the Body of Christ. Gradually I learned from my parents, Sunday school teachers, bishops (who stayed in the Rectory whilst on pastoral visits) and many others the story of this family.

The story of my third family came later, gradually dawning on me as I knew somehow that I saw the world from an oblique angle not part of the broad mainstream. Of course, I had neither vocabulary nor language for this. Instead feelings and hunches, attractions and inclinations—all of which from an early age I learned not to mention for fear of unknown consequences. I learned my homosexual story from strangers, who sometimes become friends and some dear friends. I learned it clandestinely and furtively and often with wit and amusement and loving times but this third story was a life lived alongside the other two stories. Often I was puzzled and confused as to how these three stories could be one or how they together could stand a chance of growing into that fullness of the stature of Christ about which St Paul teaches us.

Over centuries, alongside the great light that has been shed abroad of the knowledge of the light of Jesus in his incarnation, life, death and resurrection the church has well ploughed and sown fields. Fields of suspicion, prejudice, bigotry and hatred. Sometimes this sowing, in bearing its fruit, has led to death for those who have been shepherded into unacceptable categories. Women, people of colour, Jews and homosexual people (to

name some) have all been on receiving ends of pernicious teachings of the church, which has frequently used texts of Holy Scripture to promulgate and maintain its position on what it has called righteousness. This righteousness, often as not, has been in pursuit of maintaining the place of those with authority.

The most catastrophic of these teachings has been the denigration, degradation and persecution of Jews finding authorative beginnings with Augustine and Chrysostom for example; then through the Middle Ages and the encouraged inflammatory preachings on Good Fridays leading to riots, pogroms and the sanctioned murder of Jews; and on to the Holocaust of Nazi Germany in the face of which we ought be mute but dare not be lest it happen again in any form.

Same sex attracted people too went from the concentration camps to the death camps and from there to the gas chambers and crematoria. And the smoke of whose burning, along with that of Jews, people of disability, gypsies, religious minorities and others arose into the clouds of Heaven—we pray to be received in the Heart of God.

There are those in our Anglican Church who, when the legitimacy of same sex relationships comes up, want to relegate it to a second or third order issue. It is not. It is a first order issue. It is an issue of incarnational theology. It is an issue of being in Christ, God among us and the value of human and humane living where kindness and love are encouraged and therefore an issue of Salvation and Redemption.

I want to say thank-you to the five authors of the *Five Uneasy Pieces*: Megan Warner, Richard Treloar, Peta Sherlock, Alan Cadwallader and Greg Jenks all who accepted my invitation to write the chapters of this book. I want also to say thank-you to Michael Kirby, Mark Burton and Bill Countryman who wrote the introductory pieces. As a whole these works make another contribution towards the ending of the sorts of preaching and teaching that leads the Church to behave unconscionably.

In our Australian community there are frightening statistics of young people (particularly young men and particularly those in rural settings) who commit suicide while discerning their sexual orientation and for whom in life the church seems only to offer a path to repression and damnation rather than acceptance and life in all its fullness.

Hopefully this little book will open the minds and hearts of some preachers, some of the Bishops, some theological educators and some members of Synods to take a stance spiritually, pastorally and in Church

governance to ensure that the path the Church offers is fully incarnational and redemptive rather than judgemental and condemnatory.

A recent report from the Episcopal Church of Scotland[1], called for by the Government of the United Kingdom, recognises that governments should legislate for the good of all constituents and that the Church exists within its Canons which, like civil law, are not immutable but open to change. The Church, like Parliament, is master of its own business. It is too easy to defer to the established convention rather than do the work necessary to change attitude and to expand horizons of imagination and of the love of Christ among us—in this case to embrace those whose sexuality is ordered other than heterosexually.

There is a collection of 'Five Shorter Uneasy Pieces' written by the same authors and published and disseminated by Changing Attitude Australia (CAA) . These are designed to be able to be read by senior secondary students and above. This collection is available in hard copy for a small charge or downloadable for no charge from CAA. These essays could be used in the classroom, parish study group, through the branches of the Mothers' Union, Anglican Men's groups or with a group of friends for study and conversation. I am hopeful that our Anglican Church schools will take this up as a useful tool.

I want to thank Hilary Regan and the publication team at ATF Press for making the discernment and decision to publish *Five Uneasy Pieces*. Lastly but not least, I want to thank my partner, Stephen Murby Wright, who has supported me in this work through the two years of its gestation to its coming into being and who, with me, provided the substance to enable its production and who, as Patrick White said about Manoly Lascaris his decades long partner, is 'my sweet reason'.

Nigel Wright

Feast of S Andrew Ap M

2011

1. Scottish Government Consultation on the Registration of Civil Partnerships and Same Sex Marriage: Response of the Faith and Order Board of the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church (6 December 2011)http://www.scotland.anglican.org/index.php/news/entry/scottish_episcopal_church_responds_to_same_sex_marriage_consultation/

Preface

Mark Burton

The Fourth Earl of Roscommon's (the C17 Irish poet, Wentworth Dillon) advice to his and others' readers was that one ought 'Choose an author as you choose a friend.' In this is there is something fundamental about *trust*.

Five authors and their 'uneasy pieces' are gathered in this collection to be the voices of friends for many within the life of the church—Anglican or otherwise—for whom an unchosen path has often meant a life on the margins, or a life (necessarily) dissembled.

This collection of essays represents the next phase in a conversation.

The idea was put to the Reverend Nigel Wright for a reasoned counterpoint to some of the more strident declarations on what is or is not a (often *the*) Christian expression of human sexuality. This declarative stridency is often shaped by an interpretative and exegetical method that is inclined to use the Scriptures as a blunt instrument, with immediate recourse to the 'plain reading' approach.

Fr Wright gathered five Australian Anglican scholars—all of whom take the Bible with great seriousness (or 'fully seriously', to borrow from the argot employed by one of the authors)—and asked them to consider making rigorous examinations of the 'anti-homosexual' (itself, an imported category) texts of the Bible.

The Reverend Drs Alan Cadwallader, Peta Sherlock, Gregory Jenks, and Richard Treloar; in company with doctoral candidate, Ms Meg Warner, have provided careful and studied insights to the world of the Biblical authors, whom they have treated with respect.

But none of these scholars appears attracted to either wooden readings of the texts, nor to knock-down answers to complex questions: that many

contemporary Christians in their observation and experience lead lives of devotion and faith, demonstrating what St Paul styled 'the fruit of the Spirit'—while living lives that are 'differently ordered' in loving, same-sex relationships—will not allow for over-simplification which ignores a living reality.

'Keeping Lists or Embracing Freedom' (Cadwallader); 'Reading Romans as Anglicans—Romans 1:26–27' (Sherlock); 'Rules for Holy Living' (Jenks); 'On "Not Putting New Wine into Old Wineskins"' (Treloar); and 'Were the Sodomites Really Sodomites?' (Warner) make for thoughtful launching-places for considering what the Bible may or may not have to say about same-sex relationships and activity.

Hence, these essays are timely, given the nature of political debate and community discussion around the question of same-sex marriage. The Church will want to be part of the conversation, and it must surely begin by listening to a range of voices, including those within its own community who experience the Scriptures differently on some points.

The essays contained in this collection are deliberately scholarly in their approach and, as such, are not always an 'easy read'. People with a theological education—from pre diploma through post graduate—stand to benefit most.

In addition to these essays there is a set of shorter 'extract' essays written by the same authors. These have been written specifically with the 'lay person in the pew' in mind and are published by Changing Attitude Australia: available both in hard copy form or as a download.

These two publications, worked together, could well be part of a more structured curriculum study for senior secondary college, diploma and/or degree students, as well as for parish or group study purposes.

Fr Nigel Wright and the circle of scholars he has gathered are to be commended for their open and rigorous engagement with the text: the conversation would likely as not be the poorer without it.

*

This short preface was written in a period of so-called 'ordinary time' in the Church's year. As it happened two of the Bible readings set for Evening Prayer in the next Sunday contrasted the extremes of Scripture: the one, a reading from the Hebrew Bible that declares the words of Torah, engraved on tablets of stone, 'the writing of God'.